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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000436

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR AF/S;
GABORONE FOR RSO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO: ARMY AND POLICE RECOVER STOLEN WEAPONS AMID NEW
ARRESTS

REF: A) MASERU 428; B) MASERU 398

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1. SUMMARY: On June 19, the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) and the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) launched a joint operation to recover weapons stolen from army guards outside of ministerial residences (ref B). In their first major success in locating these weapons, the LDF and LMPS recovered eleven rifles, a pistol, and two military radios among other items. Authorities took one suspect into custody, while another was killed in a firefight. In other developments, radio journalist Thabang Moliko and local taxi owner Thabiso Ts'osane were questioned by authorities over the weekend. The recovery of these stolen weapons is a significant success for the GOL, and a sign that their investigation into the June 2007 attacks on ministerial residences may be picking up steam. END SUMMARY.

Stolen LDF Weapons Recovered

2. In the early morning of June 19, the LDF and LMPS launched a joint operation northeast of Maseru at Ha Ts'osane and Sekamaneng. According to Police Inspector Mphana, eight Israeli Galilee rifles, two M16 rifles, a 9 mm pistol, two army radios, and an assortment of ammunition was recovered during the operation. (NOTE: The Galilee rifle is a standard issue weapon for the LDF. END NOTE.) A man named Kantu Pakela was arrested during the action, and another man was killed during a firefight with authorities. According to police sources, a cab driver who transported the two men tipped off police after he suspected the men were carrying rifles. The remaining weapons were found in a derelict house along with 2 boxes of AK47 ammunition, a white jumpsuit, two pairs of army boots, seven ski masks, seven black uniforms, six heavy black jackets, two police-style utility belts, and a box of rubber gloves. A military spokesperson quickly announced the results of the operation on state-owned Radio Lesotho.

Fresh Arrests

13. On July 20, police took into questioning Thabang Moliko, a freelance presenter for private radio station People's Choice (PC) FM, and local taxi owner Thabiso Ts'osane. Moliko, who hosts a current affairs program on PC FM, was released at midnight the day of his arrest after questioning about his radio program. On air, Moliko had questioned the validity of military statements concerning recent operations to recover stolen weapons. Also on June 20, local taxi owner Ts'osane was questioned by police. He is still in custody. His family and lawyer were denied access to him on July 21, but were able to see him the following day. His lawyer, well-known local attorney Hae Phoofolo, complained to private opposition-oriented radio station Harvest FM on July 23 that he was not permitted to talk to his client in private. Mr. Ts'osane's mother subsequently stated on the same radio station that authorities informed her that her son would be charged with high treason.

A Victory for the LDF

14. COMMENT: For the last month, the LDF has appeared anxious to recover from the humiliation inflicted by the unidentified masked gunman who stole weapons from soldiers guarding ministerial residences. This operation, conducted in coordination with Lesotho police, finally shows the LDF in a more competent and effective light. However, the new arrests may turn the spotlight onto the LDF and GOL's new area of exposure -- human rights. Three members of the so-called

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"Makoanyane Five," a group accused by the GOL of "coup plotting" who claimed that they were tortured by the LDF, will again appear at the Magistrate Court on July 24 (ref A). As Prime Minister Mosisili triumphantly signs a \$362 million compact with the Millennium Challenge Corporation in Washington, the political situation back home remains calm but tense with the GOL taking heart in their first major operational victory against the still largely unknown forces behind the June 2007 attacks. END COMMENT.
ANDERSON